

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO AMEMBASSY ATHENS PRIORITY

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ELAB, GR, UK AS

SUBJECT: POSSIBLE ITF BOYCOTT OF GREEK SHIPPING

REF: ATHENS 1727

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: HAROLD LEWIS, ASSISTANT GORAL SECRETARY OF THE INTERNATIONAL TRANSPORT WORKERS' FEDERATION (ITF), HAS INFORMED US THAT THE ITF DOES NOT NOW CONTEMPLATE CALLING A GENERAL BOYCOTT OF GREEK SHIPPING.

2. THE ITF OFFICIAL ACKNOWLEDGED THAT CHARLES BLYTHE, ITF GENERAL SECRETARY, HAD THREATENED SUCH A BOYCOTT - IN A LETTER TO THE GREEK GOVERNMENT - IF IT DID NOT RELEASE TONY AMBATIELOS, GREEK COMMUNIST SEAMAN. BLYTHE, HE ADDED, HAD ALSO MADE SIMILAR THREATS "AND RATHER BRUTALLY" IN A RECENT CONVERSATION WITH JOHN KULUKINDIS, A LEADING LONDON-BASED GREEK SHIPOWNER, IN RELATION TO AN EXPECTED MOVE OF THE GREEK GOVERNMENT TO SUSPEND KATSAROS, HEAD OF THE GREEK SEAFARERS UNION - A MOVE BLYTHE BELIEVES WILL BE MADE TANDEM WITH THE "DUMPING" OF THE HEAD OF THE GREEK SHIPOWNERS FEDERATION.

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3. BLYTHE, ACCORDING TO LEWIS, URGED KULUKINDIS TO BRING

PRESSURE ON THE GREEK GOVERNMENT TO DETER IT FROM
TAKING THIS ACTION.

4. THE ITF OFFICIAL SAID THAT WHILE THE ITF IS VERY
MUCH IN SYMPATHY WITH THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING UNDER
WHAT IT CONSIDERS "TO BE AN EVEN MORE DICTATORIAL
REGIME THAN THE MORE RECENT COLONEL'S GOVERNMENT" IT
WOULD FIND IT VERY DIFFICULT TO IMPLEMENT A WORLD-WIDE
BOYCOTT, "LEGALLY OR OTHERWISE."

5. HE NOTED THAT THE AUSTRALIAN UNIONS WERE IN FACT
CONDUCTING A LIMITED BOYCOTT OF ABOUT 25 SHIPS BUT
"LETTING IN ONE AT A TIME", AND THAT THE ITALIANS WERE
ENGAGED IN "SPASMODIC BOYCOTTS." THERE MAY BE OTHER
UNIONS, SUCH AS IN SWEDEN AND FINLAND, WHICH MIGHT
FOLLOW SUIT. HE ALSO ACKNOWLEDGED THAT - SHORT OF A
FORMAL BOYCOTT - "IF ITF WERE TO LET THE WORD GO OUT
THAT GREEK SHIPS WERE FAIR GAME, OTHER UNIONS MIGHT
DECIDE TO TAKE POSITIVE ACTION." HOWEVER, THE APPROACH
BEING FOLLOWED BY THE ITF, ACCORDING TO LEWIS, IS TO
PRESSURE LONDON-BASED GREEK SHIPOWNERS TO INFLUENCE IN
TURN THE GREEK GOVERNMENT.

6. AN ARTICLE IN THE SUNDAY TIMES (MARCH 24) BY
MICHAEL MANNING (BEING POUCHED TO ATHENS AND THE DEPT)
NOTES THAT THE GREEK GOVERNMENT HAS REJECTED THE DEMAND
BY THE ITF TO FREE AMBATIELOS, BUT ADDS: "GREEK SHIPPING
MEN PROFESS NOT TO BE TOO ALARMED. THEY FEEL THAT
DOCKWORKERS IN MANY COUNTRIES WILL IGNORE THE BLACK-
LISTING ORDER." HOWEVER, "ONE EXPERT" TOLD MANNING
THAT WHERE A BOYCOTT DOES GO INTO EFFECT, LOSSES COULD BE
"CONSIDERABLE."

7. COMMENT: THUS FAR, THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT THE
BRITISH DOCKERS (TGWU) PLAN TO BOYCOTT GREEK SHIPS. IT
MAY BE INTERESTING TO NOTE, IN THIS CONNECTION, THAT
WHILE THE PRESENT INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS ACT BARS
SECONDARY BOYCOTTS, THE TUC, WITH SOME SUPPORT FROM THE
GOVERNMENT, IS SEEKING THE ELIMINATION OF THIS LEGAL
IMPEDIMENT, AS WELL AS OTHER LIMITATIONS ON TRADE UNIONS
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WHICH ARE PART OF THE PRESENT ACT. (LEGAL IMPEDIMENTS
HAVE NOT OF COURSE PREVENTED BOYCOTT ACTION - AS IN THE
CASE OF CALIFORNIA GRAPES OR FOREIGN COAL SHIPMENTS,
BUT HAVE PERHAPS SOMEWHAT LIMITED THEIR SCOPE.)

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